MARVEL

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WHAT IF...? DARK

VENOM

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WHAT IF...? DARK

The Marvel Universe is filled with infinite possibilities. One small choice can change the course of history and set the universe on any number of different paths. What if those choices, those moments, turned the situation...dark?

VENOM

When ***SPIDER-MAN*** *received a new costume during* ***SECRET WARS****, he was unaware it was a living symbiote that was bonded to him. After having tests run by* ***REED RICHARDS****, A.K.A.* ***MR. FANTASTIC*** *of the* ***FANTASTIC FOUR****, the symbiote was removed and kept in a cage.*

BEN GRIMM*, A.K.A. the Ever-Lovin', Blue-Eyed* ***THING****, was a founding member of the* ***FANTASTIC FOUR****, but after the events of* ***SECRET WARS****, he went out on his own, leaving the* ***FF****.*

What if...when Ben Grimm returns to the Fantastic Four, he finds the symbiote still locked up, and these two moments in time begin to collide...?

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The war.

The suit.

The scientist.

The **cage...**

THE BAXTER BUILDING.

...and the Thing.

REED?

YA IN HERE? WE WAS SUPPOSED TO MEET OUT AT THE CRASH SITE.

WORLD'S SMARTEST GUY AND YET HE'D *FORGET* ABOUT A DAY LIKE *TODAY*...

WHAK

WHAT--?

WHAK

IS THAT THING...

...ALIVE?

BASED PURELY ON OUR *KNOWN* DEFINITION OF LIFE AS THE CAPACITY FOR METABOLISM, GROWTH, REPRODUCTION AND FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY...

...I'D SAY IT'S SURELY ***ALIVE***... BUT ***SENTIENT*** IS ANOTHER MATTER ENTIRELY.

IT'S ***FASCINATING,*** REALLY. AN ORGANIC, SYMBIOTIC BEING THAT RETURNED TO EARTH ATTACHED TO OUR WEB-SLINGING COLLEAGUE IN THE FORM OF A ***COSTUME.***

AFTER ***DETACHING*** THE SYMBIOTE FROM ***SPIDER-MAN,*** WE'VE KEPT IT HERE FOR FURTHER STUDY AND EVALUATION.

OF COURSE, IT HAS GARNERED ***PLENTY*** OF INTEREST... WE'VE HAD MORE THAN A FEW ***BREAK-IN ATTEMPTS.***

ALL ***UNSUCCESSFUL*** THANKS TO OUR NEW SECURITY PROTO--

YOU FORGOT OUR ***ANNIVERSARY,*** REED.

I DIDN'T FORGET, BEN.

YOU'VE ***JUST*** RETURNED FROM MONTHS IN SPACE AND, CONSIDERING WHAT THIS DATE MEANS FOR ***YOU***... I FIGURED IT WAS BEST TO ALLOW YOU TO PROCESS THINGS ON YOUR OWN.

TELL THE TRUTH. YER AFRAID OF FEELIN' ***GUILTY*** FOR WHAT YA DID...

...FOR TURNIN' ME INTO A ***MONSTER.***

MAYBE YA SHOULDA PUT ***ME*** IN A GLASS JAR TOO, ***MR. FANTASTIC.***

YOU ***KNOW*** THAT I DO ***EVERYTHING*** I CAN TO FIND A CURE FOR YOU, BEN, AND I WON'T ***EVER*** STOP UNTIL I DO.

YOU'RE MY FAMILY, AND I'D DO ***ANYTHING--***

REED, DARLING, **THE REPORTER** IS HERE WAITING FOR YOU. YOU SAID YOU'D BE BACK IN JUST A **MINUTE.**

SORRY ABOUT THAT, **SUE.** I'M ON MY WAY NOW.

WE'LL CONTINUE THIS LATER, BEN.

YOU SHOULD COME BY FOR DINNER...I HEAR **SHE-HULK** IS TRYING HER HAND AT LASAGNA.

YEAH...SURE. I'LL CHECK MY **SCHEDULE.**

CAN YA **BELIEVE** THAT GUY?

HE'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND...

...THE **STRANGE LOOKS** AND THE **GASPS...** PEOPLE WHISPERIN' ABOUT YA LIKE YA CAN'T HEAR. CALLIN' YA NAMES AND HIDIN' THEIR KIDS--

WHAK

HEY, WHAT'RE YA TRYIN' TA--?

I'M SORRY, BUT I CAN'T... I CAN'T LET YA OUT.

Weak man.

YOU CAN... *HELP?*

Strong body.

I HELP YOU...

DEET

...YOU HELP ME.

Perfect host.

A host more suited to the symbiote's proclivities than the web-slinger.

BEN, ARE YOU STILL IN HERE? I HEARD A LOUD--

A host so broken by his **desire** to be human...

WHAT DID YOU DO?

...that he would bargain with the remnants of his humanity.

Strong body.

Weak man.

IT... CALLED TO ME.

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, BEN. THAT BEING INFECTED SPIDER-MAN.

IT MAY HAVE ENHANCED SOME OF HIS ABILITIES, BUT IT ALSO ENHANCED HIS EMOTIONAL RESPONSES... IT LATCHED ON TO HIS CONSCIENCE.

I UNDERSTAND.

IT WANTS TO HELP.

IT PROMISED TO HELP.

I KNOW HOW MUCH YOU WANT THIS, BEN... BUT THIS ISN'T THE WAY.

THAT THING IS *DANGEROUS.*

I'M SORRY.

NO...

BEN...

SSSK

...WE *WILL* FIND ANOTHER WAY. I *PROMISE.*

I *DID* FIND A WAY...AND NOW YOU WANNA STOP ME BECAUSE YOUR OWN *EGO* CAN'T STAND THAT *YOU'RE* NOT THE ONE WHO FIGURED IT OUT.

BEN... THAT'S *NOT IT AT ALL.* LISTEN TO WHAT YOU'RE SAYING...

...THIS ISN'T THE REAL YOU.

KRAAAK

THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE DEAD WRONG, PAL.

THIS IS THE MOST ME I'VE BEEN SINCE THAT DAMNED ACCIDENT.

JUST DO ME ONE FAVOR, REED...

...STAY THE HELL OUTTA MY WAY.

SSSSOMETHING HASSS CHANGED...

...I CAN SSSSMELL IT.

SPSSH

IT ISSSS FREE.

"THERE **HAS** TO BE A WAY..."

...IF THAT **SYMBIOTE** IS CAPABLE OF KEEPING THE INTEGRITY OF HIS MOLECULES...

REED...

...THEN IT **SHOULD** BE POSSIBLE TO REMOVE THE SUIT WITHOUT **DESTABILIZING** THEM **AGAIN.** IF I COULD JUST--

REED, YOU CAN FIGURE OUT HOW TO KEEP BEN HUMAN **AFTER** YOU SEPARATE THEM. BUT THE LONGER THAT **THING** STAYS ON HIM...

...WE DON'T KNOW **WHAT** IT'S CAPABLE OF.

IT TAPS INTO ITS HOST'S SUBCONSCIOUS... THEIR **DEEPEST** DESIRES.

IF I TAKE AWAY THE SUIT, I TAKE AWAY THE THING THAT'S GOTTEN BEN THE CLOSEST HE'S EVER BEEN TO HAVING HIS DESIRE TO **LOOK** HUMAN BE FULFILLED SINCE THE ACCIDENT.

WITH THAT SUIT, BEN IS A **THREAT** TO HIMSELF AND OTHERS. IT IS OUR **RESPONSIBILITY** TO DEAL WITH THAT, EVEN IF BEN DOESN'T LIKE IT.

IT IS NOT **OUR** RESPONSIBILITY, SUE.

IT IS **MY** RESPONSIBILITY TO BE A MONSTER...

"...SO BEN DOESN'T LOSE HIS *HUMANITY.*"

HIYA.

HAVE A NICE DAY, LADIES.

LOOKIN' GOOD, GRIMM...LOOKIN' GOOD.

WHAT'RE YA DOIN'?

WAIT... I CAN *SENSE* IT...

...SOMETHING'S *WRONG.*

WHATEVER'S BACK HERE...

FWSSSS

...YOU'RE GONNA BE REAL SORRY.

THE ONLY THING I'M SSSORRY ABOUT...

...ISSS HOW THE FANTASTIC FOUR HAVE TREATED YOU.

LIZARD. I DON'T SEE THE WEB-HEAD AROUND... SO I GUESS I GET TO DO THE PUNCHIN'.

I'M NOT HERE TO FIGHT.

TOO BAD, 'CUS...

...IT'S CLÖBBERIN' TIME!

THE THING. DEHUMANIZED. MONSTROUS.

UNLOVED.

EVEN BY THE MAN WHO CREATED YOU. MY LIZARD COMPANIONSSSS HAVE TOLD ME MUCH, BEN. THEY LISSSSTEN... THEY KNOW YOUR SSSSTRUGGLE.

I SAID IT AIN'T TALKIN' TIME. IT'S CLOBB--

THE FANTASSSSTIC FOUR LIED TO YOU.

WHAM

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL YOU'RE TALKIN' ABOUT, CREEP.

THEY TELL YOU THAT YOU'RE SSSSTILL ONE OF THEM.

BUT THEY ONLY SSSSAY THAT BECAUSE THEY'RE AFRAID.

YOU DON'T KNOW--

I DON'T KNOW? LOOK AT ME.

PEOPLE FEAR ME WITH ONE LOOK. SSSSCALES, TAIL, TEETH... I WILL NEVER BE ACCEPTED. EVEN WHEN I TRY TO DO GOOD...

...FEAR DRIVES PEOPLE TO HATE.

SSSSOUND FAMILIAR?

YOU'VE HURT PEOPLE. AS BOTH DR. CONNORS AND THE LIZARD.

I AIN'T LIKE YOU.

WITHOUT THE FANTASSSTIC FOUR AT YOUR SSSSIDE... DO YOU THINK YOU'D SSSSTILL BE SSSSEEN ASSSS A HERO?

ALL I WANTED WAS TO FIND A WAY TO *HELP* OTHERSSSS...TO REGENERATE LIMBSSSS.

I USSSSED MYSELF AS MY OWN TESSST SSSSUBJECT, AND I SSSSUCCEEDED...

...BUT NO ONE ELSSSSE SEES *THIS* AS A SUCCESSSS.

AND YET...I'VE NEVER SSSSTOPPED TRYING TO HELP, EVEN WHEN THE *FANTASSSSTIC FOUR* MISSSSUNDERSTAND MY INTENTIONS... EVEN WHEN THE WORLD *HATES* ME.

YOU *ALSSSO* WANT TO *HELP*.

AND THAT SUIT...THE ONE THAT HAS *CURED* YOUR *CURSE*...THAT COULD HELP *THOUSSSSANDS* OF PEOPLE.

YA THINK...?

I KNEW THERE WAS SSSSOMETHING SSSSPECIAL ABOUT SSSSPIDER-MAN'S SSSSUIT WHEN WE LEFT BATTLEWORLD... I JUST DIDN'T KNOW *HOW* SSSSPECIAL.

SSSSHARING YOUR *CURE* IS WHAT A *HERO* WOULD DO.

AND I CAN HELP YOU DO IT...

"...I CAN HELP YOU SHARE THISSSS GIFT."

YOU SURE ABOUT THIS, DOC? YOU'VE TESTED IT...?

REED ALWAYS SAID ANY GOOD EXPERIMENT MUST BE TESTED AT LEAST--

LISSSSTENING TO REED RICHARDSSSS HASSSS ONLY CAUSED PROBLEMS.

LISSSSTENING TO REED RICHARDSSSS TURNED YOU INTO A MONSSSSTER.

I JUST WANNA MAKE SURE THIS WORKS, OKAY?

IT WILL.

I PROMISSSSE.

DEET

HUH?

ARGH!

DOC... TURN IT... OFF!

NO!

DOC, YOU SAID--

I SAID I WOULD HELP YOU SSSSHARE YOUR GIFT.

I'D SSSSAY I'VE SSSSUCCEEDED.

KYUNP

YOU LYIN' PIECE 'A--

WHUMP

I DIDN'T LIE, BEN...

...I TOLD YOU THAT PEOPLE **FEAR** USSS BECAUSE THEY FEAR WHAT THEY CAN'T UNDERSTAND.

THAT FEAR BECOMESSSS HATE.

NO.

BUT **NOW**...

...I WILL GIVE THEM A **REASSSON** TO HATE...

"...BEGINNING WITH MR. FANTASTIC."

YOU KNOW *YOU* DON'T HAVE TO BE THE ONE TO DO THIS, REED.

OR, AT LEAST, YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT *ALONE.*

WE CAN CALL IN JOHNNY AND SHE-HULK...YOU KNOW THEY'D HELP, AND THEIR MISSION IS FAR LESS PRESSING THAN--

IT HAS TO BE ME.

AND WE'RE **DONE** DISCUSSING IT.

NO, WE'RE **NOT. WE'RE A FAMILY.** JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE EMOTIONAL ABOUT BEN DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO FACE HIM ALONE.

HIS ABILITIES ARE **DIFFERENT** NOW.

I **SAID** WE'RE DONE DISCUSSING--

ARDDDDD

A **BREACH?**

COMPUTER, PROVIDE VISUALS FOR--

HELLO, REED RICHARDSSSSSS.

DR. CONNORS? WHAT HAPPENED TO BEN? IS HE--?

SHE...

KRAM

REED!

SHE... TELL ME YOU'RE OKAY--

ARE YOU READY TO SSSSEEE THE FULL POTENTIAL OF THIS SSSSUIT, REED RICHARDSSSS?

...HRGN...

HRGN!

COME... ON...

GET AWAY FROM HIM!

COME ON!

UUUP

...UNGH...

UNGH!

KRAAK

HRSSSSS!

YOU THOUGHT I WASSSS NOTHING MORE THAN A CREATURE. YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE THE SSSSMARTEST MAN AROUND WHEN WE WERE SSSSTUCK ON BATTLEWORD...

YOU DON'T SSSSEEM SO SSSSSMART--

NO...

-KAFF-... H-HOW...?

I WILL ENJOY THISSSS.

CHOMP

DR. CONNORS...

...FACE *ME* INSTEAD!

YOU'RE TOO LATE.

SNAP

NO!

NO, NO, NO...

...REED... DON'T BE *GONE*...

WHAM

...I NEED YA.

I'M SO SORRY.

THIS IS MY FAULT...I DIDN'T ***LISTEN***... I SHOULDA LISTENED...

YOU DID WHAT WAS BESSSST...

...REED WAS SSSSELFISH. HE WANTED THE SUIT FOR HIMSELF, AND HE WANTED TO KEEP ***YOU*** FROM USSSSING IT.

WE ARE BETTER WITHOUT HIM, BEN.

WE?

THERE AIN'T NO ***WE***.

THERE AIN'T NO ***FANTASTIC FOUR***.

IT'S JUST ***ME!***

KRRSH

We make monsters.

And watch as they hold up a mirror.

Greed.
Anger.
Hatred.
Insecurity.
Doubt.

Our monsters **grow** as we feed them.

THEN

But the broken don't **fear** monsters...

...they become **consumed** by them.

...HRN...

Broken.

Consumed.

WHAT...=KOFF=... WOULD REED RICHARDSSSS SSSSAY?

I DUNNO. HE AIN'T HERE.

Perfect host.

KRAK

Not more monster than man...

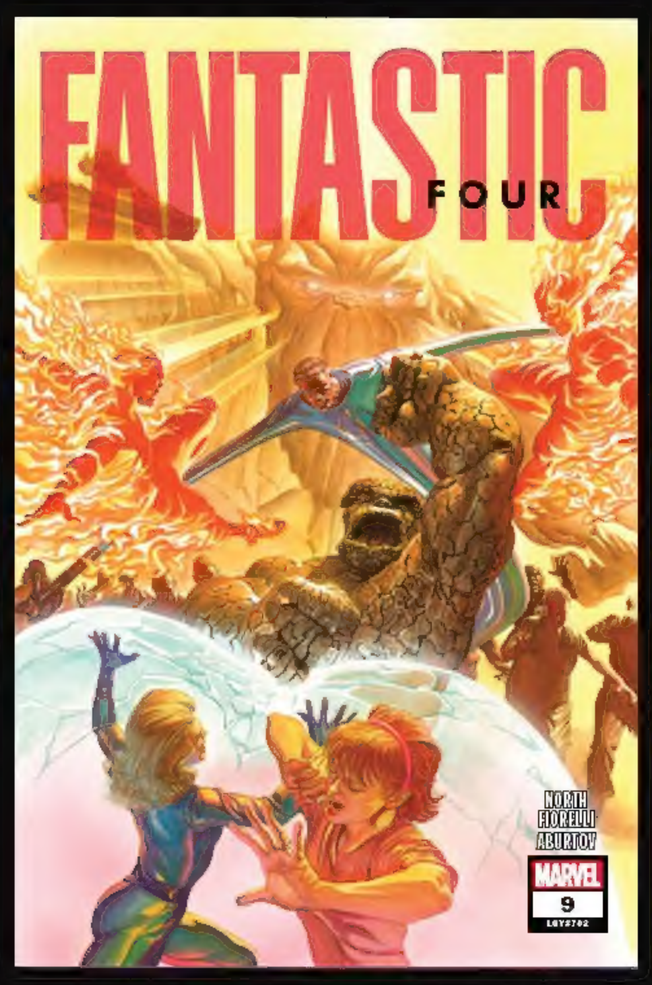
POLICE
POLICE
POLICE
POLICE
...as man **is** monster.

NEXT

WHAT IF...? DARK MOON KNIGHT

FOR A CLASSIC TALE AROUND THIS ERA, CHECK OUT
FANTASTIC FOUR #296!

FOR MORE ONGOING ADVENTURES, CHECK OUT
VENOM #23
ON SALE NOW!



FOR MORE ONGOING ADVENTURES, CHECK OUT
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ZONE